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White, S. (1978) *Continuity and change in Soviet political culture: 'An emigre study'*. *Comparative Political Studies*, 11 (3). pp. 381-395. ISSN 0010-4140

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/7921/>

Deposited on: 4 November 2009

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN SOVIET POLITICAL CULTURE

An Emigre Study

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Political culture may be defined as the attitudinal and behavioural matrix within which the political system is located. It is concerned with fundamental beliefs and values, especially as these relate to government and its role, and it employs information of this kind to explain (at least in part) the workings of the political system. In recent years the concept has attracted an increasing degree of attention, and studies of either the concept itself, or of its application to individual political systems, are now reasonably numerous.¹ There has been a particular degree of interest in the potential which the concept would appear to hold for the communist states of Eastern Europe, states in respect of whose systems of government more traditional or "institutional" approaches have generally been predominant at the expense of those which place their emphasis upon the often very distinctive and "un-western" patterns of citizen orientations to politics which are to be encountered in these states.²

The explanation for this state of affairs lies only partly in the scepticism with which specialists in Eastern Europe have until recently

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The research upon which this article was based was carried out in Israel with the financial assistance of the Nuffield Foundation. My colleagues Rene Beerman and Martin Dewhirst provided much preliminary assistance, and a number of Israeli colleagues were helpful in facilitating fieldwork. Earlier versions of this paper were read to seminars at the University of Birmingham and St. Antony's College, Oxford, from which I have greatly benefitted, and Archie Brown of St. Antony's College was kind enough to offer detailed comments upon an earlier draft. None of these individuals or institutions, however, should necessarily be identified with any of the discussion which follows.

regarded developments within political science more generally; to at least as great an extent it simply reflects the fact that opportunities to carry out research into political values and beliefs in the Eastern European countries have not normally been made available to outside researchers. A good deal of work has been carried out into the political cultures of Eastern Europe, these restrictions notwithstanding; but it has generally been based upon personal impressions, creative literature, Freudian psychology and the like, rather than upon evidence of a more direct and unambiguous character. A major exception to this rule was the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, a comprehensive and well-funded investigation into the whole social world as well as the political beliefs and values of those inhabitants of the USSR who found themselves abroad at the end of World War II, the main product of which was a volume published in 1959 entitled *The Soviet Citizen* (Inkeles and Bauer, 1959). No comparable studies have been carried out in more recent years, however, and the main findings of *The Soviet Citizen* now stand in need of correction and supplementation—or at least confirmation—in respect to the changes which have occurred in the USSR in the intervening period.

This deficiency could not be repaired so long as the Soviet authorities continued to deny access to its population for the purpose of research of this kind, both within the USSR and (by withholding permission to emigrate) outside it. No changes have taken place in the first respect in the years since the Harvard Project was completed, but the situation has now altered considerably in the latter respect with the emigration of a large number of Soviet citizens to Israel in the early 1970s.³ It is of course true that emigres are unlikely to reflect the precise distribution of opinion within the society they have chosen to leave. The recent wave of emigration is at least reasonably representative of the larger Soviet population in terms of age, sex, and occupation, however, and it is by no means invariably antiregime in sentiment (many have left in order to accompany elderly members of their family or rejoin relatives abroad, or simply to improve their material circumstances). A number of articles have already been published based in whole or in part upon evidence of this kind. This article, however, is concerned with a topic which has so far received relatively little attention in such studies, the question of attitudes towards government (or citizen political culture) among this recent group of emigres.⁴ The main body of this paper reports the principal findings which were obtained; a conclusion then

TABLE 1
Classification of Respondents (N: 37)

Age			Sex		Nationality		
-30	31-40	40+	M	F	Jewish	Non-Jewish	
21	4	12	25	12	37	0	
Date of Arrival				Education		Residence	
-1970	1971-72	1973-74	1975-76	Higher	Other	RSFSR	Other
1	4	7	25	32	5	19	18

attempts a preliminary comparison between these findings and those which were obtained in the *Soviet Citizen* investigation.

METHODOLOGY

The present article is based upon a series of extended semistructured interviews with former Soviet citizens which were conducted in Israel in the autumn of 1976. An interview schedule was employed consisting of forty questions, most of which were open-ended and invited reply so far as possible in the respondent's own words. The questions were based in the main upon those utilized in the *Soviet Citizen* study, but a number of additions and emendations were made in the light of extensive pretesting with former Soviet citizens now resident in the United Kingdom. Responses were taken down in abbreviated note form in the course of the interview itself (the introduction of a tape recorder, it was thought, might inhibit respondents unduly), and then written up at greater length immediately afterwards. The interviews generally lasted between one and three hours, they were conducted (with one exception) in Russian, and for the most part in the homes or temporary residences of respondents in the Jerusalem area. In all, some thirty-seven completed interviews were obtained. Their distribution by relevant social categories is shown in Table 1.

The sample which was obtained clearly overrepresents Jews and those with higher education, and it should not necessarily be regarded

as in any sense "representative" of the larger Soviet population. It does, however, provide sufficient numbers in most relevant categories to permit at least provisional conclusions to be drawn, and a certain intrinsic interest in any case attaches to the view of citizens who, such as these, come from a state about whose popular political values very little information is otherwise available. The additional bias introduced by the fact that the respondents were in all cases people who had chosen to leave the USSR is less easy to dispose of (although the difficulties involved may perhaps be exaggerated); respondents, however, were asked for their general evaluation of the system as a whole, and the differing kinds and degrees of hostility which emerged were then taken into account in evaluating subsequent responses. The results which were obtained from interviews were also checked against a number of other sources: a series of tape-recorded interviews and transcripts with recent Soviet emigres made available by the Russian and East European Research Centre at the University of Tel-Aviv; discussions with Israeli and other scholars involved in emigre-related research; the columns of the Israeli Russian-language press (which extends to a national daily newspaper as well as weekly and monthly journals) [Frankel, 1977]; and the impressions obtained by the present writer in the course of a series of extended research visits to the USSR itself, most recently in the spring of 1978. Each of these sources, taken in isolation, may have its shortcomings; the "convergent cumulative impact of several sources," however, may be "highly convincing" (Inkeles and Bauer, 1959: vii). It need scarcely be added that evidence regarding Soviet political beliefs and values can be gathered directly in no other way; it must either be obtained from emigres or not at all.

FINDINGS

REGIME LEGITIMACY

Most respondents, predictably, were disposed in a hostile (and sometimes in an extremely hostile) manner towards the regime, although a significant proportion (37.8%) professed to regard it either "neutrally" or even (in one case) "favourably." There was absolute unanimity, however, that the regime was firmly, and perhaps even unshakeably, established. The system was described as "unalterable for at least the next twenty or thirty years," as "eternal," or at least "unlikely to change

for the foreseeable future"; and as "one of the most stable regimes in the world." This was partly explained by force and coercion, or the fear that they might be applied (this was the view of two older respondents), and propaganda was also believed to play a role, in combination with a limited knowledge of political alternatives, at least outside the ranks of the intelligentsia. Most respondents, however, felt that other factors were more important. Chief among them were the Russian political tradition, with its inheritance of autocracy and repression (communism, one Moscow journalist maintained, was "in his deep conviction, an expression of the national character of the Russian people"), and the regime's provision of a modest but nonetheless tolerable and improving standard of living for the mass of its population. Most people, a Lenin-grad chemical engineer remarked, had in fact a vested interest in the preservation of the regime, paradoxical as this might appear. For industrial workers it provided job security and a guaranteed basic standard of living in return for no more than the routine performance of their duties and political passivity. The interest of the political bureaucracy in the preservation of the system was obvious enough (most were highly educated and would prosper under any form of government, but would lose important privileges under any other than the present regime), and even the intelligentsia enjoyed privileges of a kind, such as access to experimental cinema clubs to which the majority of the population would not be permitted to obtain entry. Most people had thus some kind of interest in the continuance of the existing system, much as they might object to many of its individual features.

Another respondent, a Moscow historian in his forties who had enjoyed reasonably close contacts with Soviet workers through his work in the dissident movement, pointed out that the majority of the people did not in fact suffer from the absence of political freedom. The slogan "the Party and the people are united" was, he thought, "90% correct." This fact was often underestimated in the West, where it was commonly believed that a small clique held power against the wishes of the vast majority of the population. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Pay was sufficient for pressing needs, such as vodka ("na vodku khvataet"), and many of the regime's policies were in fact quite popular, such as the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (a point which other respondents independently endorsed) and the Soviet government's pro-Arab stance in the Middle East. It was also suggested that the regime derived a good deal of support and authority from its apparently growing influence on the international scene and from its

firm and decisive domestic leadership ("the Soviet Union is striding ahead"). No respondent suggested a widespread degree of enthusiastic commitment to the regime (about 10% might be so disposed, according to one estimate, but in most cases this was simply careerism); neither, however, was any respondent prepared to argue that the regime encountered a significant degree of domestic opposition. Most people simply accepted it as "no worse than others" and believed that "with some reservations, it could be accepted."

STATE AND SOCIETY

Respondents were generally in favour of state guarantees of full employment (although some were careful to point out that this had not in fact been achieved in the Soviet Union, declarations notwithstanding) and of the principle inscribed in the (then) Soviet Constitution, "he who does not work shall not eat." There was less agreement about the extent to which a state might be justified in taking action to reduce inequalities and limit differences in income and material circumstances. Inequality—if this simply meant differences in individual talents and endowments—was considered to be a perfectly normal and healthy feature of any society, and there was also a case for some differences in remuneration, in order to provide incentives for people to work harder and improve their levels of qualification. But it was widely agreed that extremes of income inequality should be avoided, together with inequalities of power and status which might stem from such differences, and there was overwhelming agreement that the state had a right and a duty to limit such inequalities and secure a basic and satisfactory standard of living for all its citizens. One respondent identified "distributive justice" (in English) as the approach which best accorded with his preferences in this matter and specifically rejected the "American system." It was agreed at the same time that "artificial attempts" to bring about total equality, such as had earlier occurred in the Soviet Union, should be avoided; they might indeed have the opposite effect to that which had apparently been intended.

Most respondents favoured an extensive degree of public ownership in industry. Three declined to express an opinion on this question ("I am not an economist"); but of those who did, all but four (86.2%) were in favour of state ownership and control of heavy industry (including energy), and twelve respondents specified the inclusion of light industry

as well (one simply commented: "Everything should be in the hands of the state"). There was unanimous agreement, on the other hand, that agriculture should be returned to private hands (or at least not administered by the state, as is presently the case in the Soviet Union), and that handicrafts and services (*remeslo*) should similarly be returned to the private sector, though perhaps under some form of state control and supervision. With only two exceptions, respondents opted for a "mixed economy" system, neither wholly state-owned nor wholly private, and a number suggested that the New Economic Policy of the 1920s, under which heavy industry, banking, and foreign trade had remained in the hands of the state but small-scale private trading had been permitted, best corresponded with their ideals. There was no support for a straightforward return to capitalism (or at least to what respondents regarded as capitalism).

Respondents were similarly in agreement that transport and communications should be publicly owned and controlled, together with education and medicine (although some were willing to permit the existence of a parallel private sector in these fields, and there was a fairly general concern that state concern of the educational system should not be allowed to extend to "ideological control" as in the Soviet Union). It was also agreed that the state should exercise responsibility and control over many other areas of national life, from the provision of full employment, housing, and welfare services to the development of sport, the preservation of social unity, and the determination of a single and binding set of national priorities. Many were concerned about the failure of the government in Israel to undertake functions of this kind; and even the excesses of the 1930s in the Soviet Union seemed justified, to some younger respondents, leading as they had done to the development of industry and the survival of the USSR as a state. Not all attributed the excesses of this period to Stalin himself ("he was advised by fools"), in any case there "had to be a master (*khozyain*)," a "head of the family." And prices had been low.

CIVIC AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Respondents were asked to choose between a government which guaranteed personal liberty and permitted criticism of its actions but did not guarantee full employment, and a government which provided work and a decent standard of living for all but did not permit full freedom of speech and belief. Most respondents naturally wanted both

if they could, but when pressed, they opted virtually without exception for the first option (civil liberties) rather than the second (a guaranteed standard of living). There was similarly widespread agreement that it should be possible to form political parties without interference from the state (although the hope was frequently expressed that this would not lead to the formation of a multiplicity of competing groups, as in states such as Israel, and two respondents replied baldly, "no, there should be only one party"). Respondents were also inclined to believe that full freedom of criticism should be permitted, extending if necessary to attacks upon the government, and there was unanimous agreement that "private life," in particular religious observance, must be defended and maintained (which is perhaps what one might have expected from a group of this kind).

A number of respondents, however, observed that these predominantly "liberal" responses would not be typical of the Soviet population as a whole, or even of their family and friends. Most Soviet people, it was thought, would in fact prefer a greater degree of material well-being to a greater degree of civil liberty (it may be not altogether coincidental that the two respondents who specified a single-party system were from among those who, like the great mass of the Soviet population, did not have a higher education). Even well-educated respondents, indeed, were likely to specify that, while freedom of criticism must be permitted, it should not be allowed to extend to denigration and abuse. "Common sense must be preserved," remarked a Minsk psychiatrist; and a Moscow chemical engineer, also in his thirties, insisted that "proper limits must be observed." Criticism must be "courteous and informed, not malicious and insulting"; it should contain a "positive and constructive programme," not simply abusive slogans such as "Rabin [the then Israeli prime minister] is a fool!"; and it should not lead to "anarchy" and "disorder."

The same respondent was also of the opinion that the Israeli Communist Party should be banned; and while this view was not widely shared by other interviewees, it was reportedly a fairly common sentiment within the emigre community as a whole. Many found it difficult to understand why pictures of President Sadat ("our enemy") should appear in the Israeli press, or why communal tensions could not be resolved by the simple but brutal expedient of expelling the Arabs (as the Crimean Tatars, for instance, had been expelled from their traditional homelands within the USSR). Respondents frequently expressed the view that industrial disputes should not be allowed to

proceed as far as strike action (this was "blackmail" or "anarchy," not the way in which intelligent adults should resolve their differences), and the manner in which the Soviet government resolved matters of this kind found considerable support. "There is too much criticism here—there things are better," remarked a sixty-year-old pensioner; and a young engineering student went so far as to state: "criticism of the government must not be allowed." Even allowing for the extent to which respondents may have had specifically Israeli circumstances in mind, the broadly authoritarian or at least paternal cast of mind of most respondents—their generally high levels of education and overall rejection of the Soviet system notwithstanding—emerges reasonably clearly.

CONCLUSIONS

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

No attempt was made to replicate all the questions which respondents were asked by the *Soviet Citizen* team in the early 1950s; a number of their questions are no longer applicable, and in any case the scope of their inquiries was far wider than the more limited issue of political beliefs and values with which this article is concerned. Questions which related directly to our present purpose were, however, included in order to provide, at least provisionally, the basis for a longitudinal comparison with the earlier findings. The Israeli sample, clearly, was both much smaller and subject to a greater degree of bias than the 329 displaced persons who were interviewed by Inkeles and Bauer (and the much larger number who completed questionnaires). The discriminating juxtaposition of the two sets of findings, however, should provide at least a preliminary indication of the extent to which the citizen political orientations identified in the *Soviet Citizen* are relatively long-term and enduring, rather than short-term and conjunctural, in character. It is to be hoped that further investigations will afford the possibility of a more systematic analysis that can here be attempted.⁵

It is clear, first of all, that there is a very considerable degree of continuity so far as central political values and beliefs are concerned. Respondents, as in the earlier investigation, had a generally negative attitude towards the system as a whole, but they were nevertheless inclined, as were the *Soviet Citizen* interviewees, to favour a number

of its most distinctive individual attributes and institutions. The Soviet system of agriculture was an exception: neither group of emigres had anything to say in its favour, the Israeli respondents arguing that it deprived farmers of any incentive to increase their production and that it had been a manifest failure in practice. Both groups of emigres similarly took a hostile attitude towards the secret police system, although the Israeli respondents did not often cite the KGB as a major source of disaffection, and when pressed more closely upon it they were more likely to remark that, objectionable as its activities no doubt were, there had been major and welcome changes in both the scope of its functions and in the manner in which they were exercised. These two features apart, however, there was a considerable degree of support in both samples for many of the regime's most distinctive institutions. There was strong support in both cases for a wide degree of public ownership in industry, less extensive than is presently the case in the USSR, but nonetheless greater than in most contemporary capitalist countries; the Soviet health and educational systems found a widespread degree of support in both groups; and there was a similar degree of support for the regime's achievements in both economic and cultural development. Israeli respondents emphasized that there were many shortcomings in the services which the Soviet government provided: medical treatment was often poor and prescriptions difficult to obtain, the standard of education in rural areas left a lot to be desired, and the choice of films, plays, and books which was available, even in the major cities, was generally deplorable. But it was these features of the system which respondents were most likely to regard as among its most praiseworthy attributes, and which there was least desire to change should the present administration lose power. In both cases the main outlines of the Soviet "system" (the social and economic framework of Soviet life), as distinct from the "regime," appeared to "enjoy the support of popular consensus" (Inkeles and Bauer 1959: 397).

The political institutions of the Soviet State, however, attracted no corresponding degree of support, and although it would be hazardous to generalize from this finding to the larger Soviet population as a whole, it can at least be noted that comparisons *within* the group of Israeli interviewees reveal no tendency, such as that to which the *Soviet Citizen* drew attention, for younger people to be generally less alienated than their elders.⁶ Respondents in their twenties, admittedly, were more likely to take a favourable view of the activities of Lenin than those in older age-groups, and those who took a negative view were

TABLE 2
Beliefs by Age (N: 37)

	All	-30	31-40	40+
Attitude towards the system: (<i>'Sovetskaya Vlast'</i>)				
favourable	1 (2.7%)	1 (4.8%)	0	0
neutral	14 (37.8%)	10 (47.6%)	1 (25%)	3 (25%)
unfavourable	22 (59.5%)	10 (47.6%)	3 (75%)	9 (75%)
	37 (100%)	21 (100%)	4 (100%)	12 (100%)
Attitude towards the activities of Lenin:				
favourable	15 (42.9%)	12 (63.1%)	1 (25%)	2 (16.7%)
unfavourable	20 (57.1%)	7 (36.9%)	3 (75%)	10 (83.3%)
	37 (100%)	19 (100%)	4 (100%)	12 (100%)
Attitude towards public owner- ship of heavy industry:				
favourable	25 (86.2%)	18 (94.7%)	1 (50%)	6 (75%)
unfavourable	4 (13.8%)	1 (5.3%)	1 (50%)	2 (25%)
	29 (100%)	19 (100%)	2 (100%)	8 (100%)

NOTE: Don't Knows and other noncodeable responses excluded.

more likely to do so reluctantly or with qualifications ("perhaps it wasn't his fault," "his ideas were broadly positive, but their ultimate results were negative," and so forth) [Table 2]. Younger people were also more likely to find particular aspects of the system to be praiseworthy, such as the educational and health systems, a "fairly high level of culture," a relatively low crime rate, full employment, cheap housing and public transport, an absence of acquisitive consumerist attitudes, and so forth. As the *Soviet Citizen* had hypothesized, this reflects the changed and improving circumstances in which most recent Soviet generations have grown up: younger Israeli respondents had had no direct experience with Stalinism (most of those over forty, in contrast, had been arrested or had suffered the loss of family and friends); they had obviously acquired no prerevolutionary experience; and their material circumstances in the USSR they regarded as either good or excellent, and improving.

While willing to accept many of the social and economic institutions of the Soviet system, however, such as extensive public ownership and the comprehensive provision of welfare, younger respondents in the Israeli sample were generally committed to a thoroughgoing democratization of the political system. There was virtually universal support for the principles of freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of belief (including religious observance), the right to choose one's place of residence, and a multiparty system. Virtually all the younger respondents, for instance, believed that "it should be possible for all who wish to do so to form their own political parties, without interference from the authorities," and there was strong support for the right to criticize the actions of government to whatever extent was considered necessary. These younger interviewees had been born and brought up under wholly Soviet conditions, they had parents who were often favourably disposed towards the regime, and they had generally been in no serious material difficulty. Yet there could be no doubt, comparing these findings with those which the *Soviet Citizen* team obtained in the early 1950s, of the extent to which younger respondents had become both more reform-minded and less inhibited in expressing their views than their elders.

This is not necessarily to suggest that reformist sentiment is widespread among Soviet youth, still less that it heralds the automatic "liberalization" of the regime as this younger generation moves into positions of power and responsibility. Our sample is small and admittedly imperfect; and even were it representative of the larger population, it would still be impossible to disregard the rewards and sanctions of which the regime additionally disposes as a means of encouraging activities of which it approves and discouraging those of which it does not. Our findings do, however, at least suggest that it should not simply be assumed that the passage of time will in itself enhance the legitimacy of the regime, or of its political arrangements more specifically. The better educated—on the basis, at least, of the present sample—resent their inability to participate in social and political life on any other than the regime's terms, together with the petty restrictions which are placed upon their work and self-expression; younger people appear no more willing to accept such restrictions than their elders; while even industrial workers, however satisfied they may presently be with the relatively satisfactory standard of living with which the regime had so far provided them, may soon find their commitment disturbed by the increases in labour discipline and rises in price which appear likely to be intro-

duced in an attempt to arrest the fall in growth rates and increases in budgetary subsidies which the Soviet economy has recently been experiencing.⁷

Overall, then, our results suggest that the regime may have achieved a relatively high level of legitimacy, or uncoerced support, and that many of the system's most distinctive attributes, such as public ownership of the means of production and the comprehensive provision of welfare, may have the support of a majority even of those who reject the system as a whole and have chosen to live elsewhere. But the regime appears to have had no comparable success in generating support for the institutions by which policies are determined and formulated. There was virtually no support, in our findings, for the traditional mechanisms of one-party rule, and younger respondents were even more emphatic than their elders in demanding a range of civil and political liberties with which present political arrangements would seem scarcely to be compatible. This limited degree of commitment to the "regime," as distinct from the "system," in turn suggests the tentative conclusion that the Soviet political system may be placed under some degree of strain by the unpalatable choices, economic and otherwise, which future decades appear likely to place upon it. Liberal democracies, buttressed by the "come rain or come shine" legitimacy which their political arrangements confer upon them, may find it possible to survive a period of static or even falling living standards; a system whose legitimacy is based more narrowly upon "performance" criteria may find it rather less easy.

NOTES

1. The standard early work is Pye and Verba (1965). See also Kavanagh (1972) and Rosenbaum (1975), which list most of the national studies so far completed.

2. See for example the "Digest of the Conference on Political Culture and Comparative Communist Studies" (Digest, 1972), Tucker (1973), Mayer (1972), Jowitt (1974), Lane (1976), Brown and Gray (1977), and White (forthcoming).

3. It is estimated that Israel received about 110,000 immigrants from the Soviet Union in the period 1971-1975, the vast majority of them Jews (*Guardian*, London, 30 December 1975, p. 9). The motives of the Soviet leadership in permitting this recent wave of emigration are considered in Gitelman (1972) and Korey (1976); the situation of Jews in the USSR is discussed more generally in Baron (1977), Korey (1973), and Schroeter (1971). The problems which former Soviet citizens have encountered in adjusting to life in Israel are described in Shepherd (1977) and Gidwitz (1976).

4. See for instance Ross (1974), Friedgut (1974, 1975), Matthews (1975), and Gitelman (1977). (I am grateful to Professor Gitelman for providing me with a copy of this paper in advance of publication.)

5. A programme of extended life history interviews with former Soviet citizens now resident in Israel, currently being conducted by Dr. Ze'ev Katz of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, promises much in this respect. A number of other investigations are also in progress.

6. See particularly the initial research report of the Harvard Project (Bauer et al.) which speaks of a "very definite impression of greater potential and actual support of the whole Soviet system by the rising younger generations" and argues that the "Soviet regime may expect to increase the breadth and stability of its support with the passage of time, particularly as death claims the older generations who typically opposed the system on principle and could not easily be reconciled" (Inkeles and Bauer, 1959: 275ff.).

7. See further on this point Grossman (1976) and Cohn (1976). A number of official consumer price rises were introduced early in 1977, an event without precedent in recent Soviet economic history, and hints have been dropped that further increases may well be necessary in order to reflect changing relative scarcities (*Pravda*, 5 January and 8 February 1977, and Radio Liberty Research, *Annotatsii, Current Abstracts*, 16 March 1977, p. 3). Authoritative spokesmen have also called for the extension of the "Shchekino system," the "Zlobin method," and a number of other procedures designed to increase output while simultaneously reducing the workforce engaged in its production (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 4 May 1977, p. 11, and *Izvestiya*, 23 June 1977, p. 4).

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